**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOSHUA-008. RAHAB by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Joanna paved Rahab the harlot alive... and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day."*

*Joshua 6:25*

This story comes in like an oasis in these terrible narratives of Canaanite extermination. There is much about it that is beautiful and striking, but the main thing is that it teaches the universality of God's mercy, and the great truth that trust in Him unites to Him and brings deliverance, how black soever may have been the previous life.

I need not tell over again the story, told with such inimitable picturesqueness here: how the two spies, swimming the Jordan in flood, set out on their dangerous mission and found themselves in the house of Rahab, a harlot; how the king sent to capture them, how she hid them among the flax-stalks bleaching on the flat roof, confessed faith in Israel's God and lied steadfastly to save them, how they escaped to the Quarantania hills, how she perished not in the capture, entered into the community of Israel, was married, and took her place--hers!--in the line of David's and Christ's ancestresses.

The point of interest is her being, notwithstanding her previous position and history, one of the few instances in which heathen were brought into Israel. The Epistle to the Hebrews and James both refer to her. We now consider her story as embodying for us some important truths about faith in its nature, its origin, its power.

**I. Faith in its constant essence and its varying objects.**

Her creed was very short and simple. She abjured idols, and believed that Jehovah was the one God. She knew nothing of even the Mosaic revelation, nothing of its moral law or of its sacrifices. And yet the Epistle to the Hebrews has no scruple in ascribing faith to her. The object of that Epistle is to show that Christianity is Judaism perfected. It labours to establish that objectively there has been advance, not contradiction, and that subjectively there is absolute identity. It has always been faith that has bound men to God. That faith may co-exist with very different degrees of illumination. Not the creed, but the trust, is the all-important matter. This applies to all pre-Christian times and to all heathen lands. Our faith has a fuller gospel to lay hold of. Do not neglect it.

Beware lest people with less light and more love get in before you, who shall come from the east and the west.

**II. Faith in its origin in fear.**

There are many roads to faith, and it matters little which we take, so long as we get to the goal. This is one, and some people seem to think that it is a very low and unworthy one, and one which we should never urge upon men. But there are a side of the divine nature and a mode of the divine government which properly evoke fear.

God's moral government, His justice and retribution, are facts.

Fear is an inevitable and natural consequence of feeling that His justice is antagonistic to us. The work of conscience is precisely to create such fear. Not to feel it is to fall below manhood or to be hardened by sin.

That fear is meant to lead us to God and love. Rahab fled to God. Peter girt his fisher's coat to him, and lost his fear in the sunshine of Christ's face, as a rainbow trembles out of a thunder-cloud when touched by sunbeams.

We have all grounds enough to fear. Urge these as a reason for trust.

**III. Faith in its relation to the previous life.**

It is a strange instance of blindness that attempts have been made to soften down the Bible's plain speaking about Rahab's character.

In her story we have an anticipation of New Testament teaching.

The woman that was a sinner. Mary Magdalene. Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. She shows us that there is no hopeless guilt. None is so in regard to the effects of sin on a soul. There is no heart so indurated as that its capacity for being stirred by the divine message is killed. There is none hopeless in regard to God. His love embraces all, however bad. The bond which unites to Him is not blamelessness of life but simple trust. The grossest vice is not so thorough a barrier as self-satisfied self-righteousness. A thin slice of crystal will bar the entrance of air more effectually than many folds of stuff.

**IV. Faith in its practical effects.**

Rahab's story shows how living faith, like a living stream, will cut a channel for itself, and must needs flow out into the life.

Hence James is right in using her as an example of how we are justified by works and not by faith only, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is equally right in enrolling her in his great muster-roll of heroes and heroines of faith, and asserting that by faith she perished not among them who believed not. The one writer fastens on a later stage in her experience than does the other. James points to the rich fruit, the Epistle to the Hebrews goes deeper and lays bare the root from which the life rose to the clusters.

The faith that saves is not a barren intellectual process, nor an idle trust in Christ's salvation, but a practical power. If genuine it will mould and impel the life.

So Rahab's faith led her, as ours, if real, will lead us, to break with old habits and associations contrary to itself. She ceased to be Rahab the harlot, she forsook her own people and her father's house. But her conquest of her old self was gradual. A lie was a strange kind of first-fruits of faith. Its true fruit takes time to flower and swell and come to ripeness and sweetness.

So we should not expect old heads on young shoulders, nor wonder if people, lifted from the dunghills of the world, have some stench and rags of their old vices hanging about them still. That thought should moderate our expectations of the characters of converts from heathenism, or from the degraded classes at home. And it should be present to ourselves, when we find in ourselves sad recurrences of faults and sins that we know should have been cast out, and that we hoped had been so.

This thought enhances our wondering gratitude for the divine long-suffering which bears with our slow progress. Our great Teacher never loses patience with His dull scholars.

**V. Faith as the means of deliverance and safety.**

From external evils it delivers us or not, as God may will. James was no less dear, and no less faithful, than John, though he was early slain with the sword, and his brother died in extreme old age in Ephesus. Paul looked forward to being delivered from every evil work, though he knew that the time of his being offered was at hand, because the deliverance that he looked for was his being saved into His heavenly kingdom.

That true deliverance is infallibly ours, if by faith we have made the Deliverer ours.

There is a more terrible fall of a worse city than Jericho, in that day when the city of the terrible ones shall be laid low, and our Joshua brings it to the ground, even to the dust. In that same day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: we have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks, and into that eternal home He will certainly lead all who are joined to Him, and separated from their foul old selves, and from the city of destruction, by faith in Him.